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General

Belgium is located in western Europe, bordering the North Sea between France and the Netherlands.

The climate is temperate with mild winters and cool summers that are rainy, humid and cloudy.

The terrain is flat coastal plains in the NW, with central rolling hills, and the rugged mountains of the Ardennes Forrest in the SE.

The Schelde and the Maas are large rivers which have their sources in France. In Belgium these rivers are called the Escaut and Meuse, respectively.

Buoyage System

The IALA Buoyage System (Region A) is in effect. See Chart No. 1 for further IALA Buoyage System information.

Cautions

High speed craft operate between the coast of Belgium and the coast of the United Kingdom. For further information on high speed craft, see United Kingdom.

Currency

The official unit of currency is the Belgian franc, consisting of 100 centimes.

Firing Areas

Firing practice takes place in the coastal sectors of the following areas:

1. Area 1—Within a radius of 2.5 miles centered on Nieuwpoort Light (51 09.3'N., 2 43.9'E.).
2. Area 2—Within a radius of 7.5 miles centered on 51 08.7'N, 2 46.2'E.
3. Area 3—Within a radius of 12.8 miles centered on 51 08.7'N., 2 46.2'E.

During firing practice, the following signals are shown from a mast in 51 09.3'N, 2 44.2'E(350m WSW of Nieuwpoort water tower):

1. A square red flag with a red ball above it indicates Area 1 in use.
2. A square red flag with two balls above it indicates Area 2 in use.
3. A square red flag with three balls above it indicates Area 3 in use.

For mine exercise areas situated off the coast, see The Netherlands.

Government

Belgium is a constitutional monarchy comprised of nine provinces. The chief of state is King Albert II.

The capital is Brussels.

Holidays

The following holidays are observed:

New Year's Day; Easter Monday; May 1, Labor Day; Ascension Day; Whit Monday; July 21, National Holiday; August 15, Assumption Day; Nov. 1, All Saint's Day; Nov. 11, Armistice Day; and December 25, Christmas Day.

Industries

The main industries are engineering and metal products, motor vehicle assembly, processed food and beverages, chemicals, basic metals, textiles, glass, petroleum, and coal.

Regulations

A pilotage agreement based on an international treaty between Belgium and the Netherlands applies to the estuary of Westerschelde.

Both countries have authority to pilot vessels from sea to Antwerpen and Ghent and conversely.

Search and Rescue

Lifeboats and rescue equipment are maintained at Oostende, Nieuwpoort, and Zeebrugge.

A watch during inclement weather is also kept at De Panne, Middelkerke, and Blankenberge.

The Belgian Coastguard, "Coastguard Oostende," is responsible for coordinating SAR operations. MRCC Oostende and Oostende Radio (OST) both maintain a continuous listening watch of international distress frequencies. A Rescue Sub Center is situated at Koksijde airforce helicopter base.

Signals

Vessels requesting pilotage for Belgian ports may do so by displaying Flag G by day, sending Morse P by flashing light at night, and by sounding the letter H in reduced visibility, 3 seconds after sounding the prescribed international signal in fog. Similar methods may be employed to request port pilotage by signalling G6 for the port of Zeebrugge, G7 for Nieuwpoort, and G8 for Oostende.

The following storm signals are displayed at Oostende, Nieuwpoort, Blankenberge, and Zeebrugge for Force 4 or higher:

1. By day—Two black cones, points together.
2. By night—A violet flashing light.

Time Zone

The Time Zone description is ALPHA (-1).

U.S. Embassy

The U.S. Embassy is situated at 27 Boulevard du Regent, B-1000, Brussels.

The mailing address is PSC 82, Box 002, APO AE 09724, Brussels.